Earth Work 1979

Toh, Charmaine

Published by National Gallery Singapore

Toh, Charmaine.
Earth Work 1979,

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Foreword

— Eugene Tan

National Gallery Singapore is pleased to be presenting Earth Work 1979 by Tang Da Wu. This exhibition is a restaging of selected works from Tang’s seminal exhibition Earth Work, first shown at the National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG) in 1980, one of the earliest exhibitions of land art in Singapore. Tang was at the forefront of the new transformations in the artistic landscape of Singapore in the 1980s and 1990s, a significant historical moment which witnessed the sustained development of conceptual art including performance, installation and video art. Earth Work 1979 will examine Tang’s usage of organic materials and public spaces as aesthetic responses to the ecological impact of urban development in Singapore. How did Earth Work produce new ways of thinking that resonated on both an artistic and ecological level? In what ways did Tang’s contact with British conceptualism influence his artistic strategies? What role did institutions, such as NMAG, play in shaping exhibition histories in Singapore? Earth Work 1979 seeks to address these questions to critically examine the turn to conceptual art in Singapore, as well as the historical precedents of art and knowledge production in a period of anthropogenic ecological crisis.

Earth Work 1979 constitutes a significant part of National Gallery Singapore’s exhibition programming that complement the Gallery’s two permanent galleries. While the permanent exhibition spaces are dedicated to the broad art historical narratives of Singapore and Southeast Asia spanning the 19th century to the present day, exhibitions such as Earth Work 1979 will offer in-depth critical viewpoints and new art historical research into artistic practices from the region.

This publication which accompanies the exhibition is the first of its kind to focus on Tang’s engagement with land art. The exhibition curator, Charmaine Toh, has also worked closely with the artist to include in this catalogue never-before-seen photo documentation, archival materials and earlier work considered to be precursors to Earth Work. We hope that the exhibition and this accompanying publication is a step towards extending critical scholarship and knowledge on the art history of Singapore. The Gallery would like to thank the artist for his dedication and generosity in sharing his experience with us; the exhibition would not be possible without him. We would also like to thank Chng Seok Tin, Choy Weng Yang and Tamares Goh for their compelling insights and invaluable contributions to this publication.

Eugene Tan
Director
National Gallery Singapore
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